

Message Text

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R 141155Z MAR 74

FM AMCONSUL LENINGRAD

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 324

AMEMBASSY BONN

AMCONSUL FRANKFURT

AMEMBASSY HELSINKI

AMEMBASSY MOSCOW

C O N F I D E N T I A L L E N I N G R A D 0 2 2 8

E.O 11652: GDS

TAGS: ASEC, ACOM

SUBJECT: DELAY OF POUCH SHIPMENT IN LENINGRAD CUSTOMS.

1. FOLLOWING RECOUNTS CIRCUMSTANCES OF CUSTOMS DIFFICULTIES CONNECTED WITH TRUCK WHICH DELIVERED ACR'S TO LENINGRAD. MATTER WAS EVENTUALLY RESOLVED SATISFACTORILY, BUT EXPERIENCE HAS OBVIOUS RELEVANCE TO FUTURE CLASSIFIED SHIPMENTS BROUGHT IN BY TRUCK.

2. NURMINEN COMPANY TRUCKS WITH TRAILERS SEALED AS DIPLOMATIC POUCH, ACCOMPANIED BY DOCUMENTED NON-PROFESSIONAL COURIERS BARKMAN AND HARVEY, ARRIVED LENINGRAD AT APPROXIMATELY 1530 MARCH 11, 1974. ALTHOUGH THERE WAS PREARRANGED AGREEMENT THAT CUSTOMS FORMALITIES COULD BE ACCOMPLISHED AT THE OFFICE BUILDING, LENINGRAD CUSTOMS AUTHORITIES REFUSED AT LAST MINUTE AND INSISTED THAT TRUCK BE BROUGHT TO CUSTOMS WAREHOUSE FOR CLEARANCE. DURING THREE HOUR DISCUSSIONS BETWEEN BARKMAN AND CUSTOMS AUTHORITIES, SOVIETS SAID THEY DID NOT RECOGNIZE TRAILERS AS POUCH AND INSISTED THAT POUCH SEAL BE BROKEN AT CUSTOMS AND DOOR OPENED FOR PERFUNCTORY INSPECTION. SOVIETS STRESSED THERE WAS NO INTENTION WHATSOEVER TO EXAMINE CONTENTS. BARKMAN, AND LATER ADMIN OFFICER KING, REFUSED TO OPEN TRUCK AT CUSTOMS IN VIEW OF TRUCKS STATUS AS SEALED POUCH. VEHICLE WAS PERMITTED TO RETURN TO CONGEN OFFICE BUILDING STILL SEALED, WHERE IT WAS PARKED FOR NIGHT AND KEPT UNDER

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MARINE GUARD.

3. AT OPENING OF BUSINESS MARCH 12, BARKMAN AND GSO AGAIN WENT TO CUSTOMS TO CLEAR SHIPMENT. LONG NEGOTIATIONS AT CUSTOMS PROVED FRUITLESS, WITH SOVIETS CLAIMING THAT, WHILE CONTENTS OF CONTAINER CONSIDERED DIPLOMATIC MAIL, CONTAINER ITSELF WAS ONLY VEHICLE AND MUST BE OPENED. A COMPROMISE OFFERED BY CONGEN WAS REBUFFED BY ACTING HEAD OF LENINGRAD CUSTOMS WHO SUGGESTED THAT CONGEN SEEK AGREEMENT WITH MFA RPT MFA ABOUT SHIPMENTS STATUS AS DIPLOMATIC MAIL ON AN EXCEPTION AS BASIS. SEALED TRUCK AGAIN RETURNED TO OFFICE BUILDING FOR NIGHT WITH MARINE GUARD POSTED.

4. CONSUL GENERAL CONTACTED DIPLOMATIC AGENCY AFTERNOON OF MARCH 12, RESTATED CONGEN POSITION, AND REQUESTED THAT MATTER BE QUICKLY RESOLVED. SINCE HEAD OF DIPLOMATIC AGENCY, POPOV, WAS ATTENDING OBKOM RPT OBKOM PARTY CONFERENCE, AGENCY PROMISED THAT ACTION WOULD BE TAKEN AS SOON AS HE WAS FREE TO ACT. POPOV THEN CONTACTED MOSCOW LATE EVENING MARCH 12 AND TELEPHONED CONSUL GENERAL 0900 MARCH 13 TO ADVISE THAT CUSTOMS SEALS COULD BE REMOVED AT CUSTOMS WAREHOUSE AND TRUCK COULD RETURN TO CONGEN FOR POSTS REMOVAL OF DIPLOMATIC POUCH SEAL AND UNLOADING.

5. CONGEN RECOMMENDS THAT FUTURE CLASSIFIED SHIPMENTS SENT BY TRUCK FROM HELSINKI NOT RPT NOT FOLLOW PRACTICE OF REPRESENTING TRUCK ITSELF AS "DIPLOMATIC POUCH". INSTEAD, CONTENTS OF TRUCK SHOULD BE SEALED AS DIPLOMATIC POUCHES. ALTHOUGH CONSULAR CONVENTION PLACES NO LIMIT ON SIZE OF SEALED DIPLOMATIC POUCH, SOVIETS WERE OBVIOUSLY TAKEN BACK BY CONCEPT OF TRUCK VAN AS POUCH. SOVIETS WERE CLEARLY ACTING IN GOOD FAITH THROUGHOUT CONTRETEMPS AND APPEARED GENUINELY ANXIOUS TO RESOLVE MATTER AS SOON AS POSSIBLE WITHIN LIMITS OF RESPECTIVE INTERPRETATIONS. MATTER WAS COMPLICATED FURTHER BY FACT THAT TRUCK DRIVER HAD PRESENTED BILL OF LADING TO SOVIET CUSTOMS AT BORDER WHICH LISTED 160 ITEMS OF FREIGHT. POPOV MADE IT CLEAR IN CONVERSATION WITH CONSUL GENERAL THAT SOVIETS HAD RESOLVED MATTER IN INTERESTS OF GOOD RELATIONS BUT NEVERTHELESS REQUESTED US SIDE IN FUTURE COMPLY WITH SOVIET CUSTOMS REGULATIONS.

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